

*It's a pretty big deal to change banks. It's not the sort of thing a person does, unless there's a really good reason for them to do so.... And the more invested one is, **with** a particular bank, the less likely we are to change our allegiance – a big job....*

*But the banks **know** it's a big hassle for you to shift your accounts elsewhere, and so they take advantage of that – they offer a better deal to a potential **new** customer, than what they do to a customer who has been with them for years...*

*And the loyal customers continue to be loyal, until they decide, "Enough is enough – it's time to look elsewhere"*

*And thus begins the comparisons.*

*Which bank is going to give:*

- *the highest interest, when I invest?*
- *the lowest interest, when I borrow?*
- *Is there a local branch?*

*Is there somewhere that's open when it's convenient for me to go to the bank. (probably not any longer in St George).*

- *And how secure will my money be?  
Is the bank likely to go belly-up...*

*But, it's a big job. When you way it all up, is it worth changing banks???*

Now, you may not have realised this, but changing your place of banking, is part of the biggest and most important decision you will make in your life...

You see, becoming a Christian – becoming a Disciple of Jesus, is more than a matter of saying “The sinners prayer” – it’s a total shift of allegiance in one’s life... And as a Christian, there is a new bank which is open to you (**Let’s** call it “Heaven’s First National”)...

- Not just anyone can bank at HFN. Only Disciples of Jesus are account-holders.
- And HFN only receives deposits – you can’t make withdrawals;
- And it’s a bank that doesn’t want your money; or your silver or your gold; and it has no safety deposit boxes
- Heavens First National, guards your deposits, and they:
  - can’t be stolen;
  - can’t be eaten by moths;
  - the tax-man can’t get his sticky fingers on it;
  - And your investments won’t be devalued by inflation;
  - And if there’s a war (and our nation lose that war), those deposits won’t, all of a sudden become worthless...
- HFN, won’t charge you fees, **and**;
- it won’t use its profits, to push an ungodly agenda (like many of the banks do today)

**But** changing accounts to HFN, is a **major** decision.

As Isaac Watts wrote (in the early 1700's),  
*When I survey the wondrous cross  
on which the Prince of glory died,  
my richest gain I count but loss,  
and pour contempt on all my pride.*

And then in the last verse, he says:  
*Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
that were a present far too small.  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
demands my soul, my life, my all.*

You see, to bank with HFN, takes a complete change in allegiance...

And that's OK, because an unbeliever – that's probably the last place they want to bank...

So, I've sorta started where we're going to finish, so let me back up a bit.

**Last** week, we were talking about treasure, and where we store our treasure. And we talked about “Savings and Retirement”, and what it means to be “rich toward God” – to be rich toward God in:

- time;
- witness;
- generosity;
- serving ...

And the parable of the Rich Fool, is so confronting, because it calls into question, what is the **aim** for many of us – that is:

- to stack it away;
- to save it up;
- increase our holdings;
- grow our super;
- expand the share portfolio...

..., all so that we can have the assurance that when the time comes for retirement:

- I'll be able to enjoy all of this nest-egg that I've accumulated for myself;
- It'll be all about me;
- I can take it easy;
- enjoy life;
- and enjoy life's luxuries...

And to the rich man who hoarded it all up, God said "**Fool**"...

And the lesson? The Fool is the one who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God...

*Life can be cut short at any moment... And for us, we've been made aware of that, this week... And we know that Allan was a man who was rich toward God... It was unexpected, but he was prepared...*

But, the lesson last week, was: The Fool is the one who lays up treasure for **himself**, and is not rich toward God...

Now, that brings up some pertinent questions. And I was surprised that I wasn't asked any questions last week. I fully expected that somebody would ask:

- “Isn't good stewardship about providing for ourselves (if we are able), so we aren't going to be a drain on others???”; or
- Isn't “saving up for the tough times” a Godly thing to do? I mean God used Moses to save up the 7 bumper years, so that people didn't starve in the 7 years of disastrous yields;
- Proverbs 21:20 (NIV) <sup>20</sup> The wise store up choice food and olive oil, but fools gulp theirs down.

I fully expected that somebody would've asked something along those lines. It's Godly – it's wise, to store up in the good years, so that we're not destitute in the bad...

And if that question **had** been asked, the answer was going to be: “Wait until next week”. Well guess what folks – next week is here, and so we're going to be answering those unasked questions. Today's sorta like part 2 of a 2-part series...

Righto: Now, this is important to grasp:  
**Last** week, Jesus was talking to the crowds.  
**This** week, He's talking to His disciples.

**Last** week, the Fool, was a person who accumulated wealth and possessions for his own luxury – to spend on himself – to ensure that there were good times to come – Eat, drink, be merry... Totally focused on “self”, but he paid no attention to God...

**This** week, Jesus turns to His Disciples, He’s talking to those who **are** His.

Now, have you ever noticed, that in the Bible, some things that God says, are for everybody. But sometimes, God is speaking specifically to His people? Well, this is one of those instances. And Jesus gives His Disciples an assurance, that unbelievers are **not** given.

The truth of the matter, is “wealth” can be as big of a problem for those who do **not** have it, as what it is for those who do.

For those who **are** wealthy, the danger is “Godless greed” – keeping it all for ourselves – spending it on luxuries for us, while others starve...

For those who are **not** wealthy, the danger can be, “Faithless worry and anxiety”...

So **last** week’s lesson, is “Don’t stack up wealth without giving God a thought”.

**This** week’s lesson, is for those who **are** following Jesus: Yes, it is quite OK to give reasonable forethought to provision

for the necessities of life, but **never** be anxious, and **don't** be worried about it...

And so **last** week, Jesus warned people “Don't trust in your possessions”.

**This** week, He reminds His Disciples, “where our trust **should** be”.

Righto:

To me, it seems “beyond strange”, that we are one of the world's most well-off populations, and yet at the same time, “fear”; “worry”; and “anxiety”, have become endemic in our society. (Greta Thunberg doesn't help BTW) Some are **crippled** by their anxiety. And I wish that I could stand here today and tell you, “*Oh, but it doesn't happen to Christians*”. But it does...

It **shouldn't**, but it does. And as I read this, it is confirmed, that the cause of worry and anxiety, is a lack of faith. And **increasing** our faith, overcomes worry and anxiety...

Now, I'm sure there will be some who would take-me-to-task over that – “Michael, you're too simplistic – you don't understand.”... But you know what? If the Lord Jesus Christ assures His Disciples: **do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on.** – if Jesus said **O you of little faith!**, to those who **are** anxious about these things, I'm not going to contradict Him. Especially when He gives good reasons for what He's saying.

“**Life**” – Your psyche – who you are – your physical life, is **not** about what you eat, or what you wear. *I think it might have been Shakespeare who said something like “The clothes maketh the man”... That’s rubbish... And the number of people who try and present themselves as someone they are not, by the clothes they wear...*

- *The career violent criminal who wears a suit to court, to make himself look respectable;*
  - *The pre-teen, trying to pass herself off, as an adult;*
- or my personal favourite:*
- *The politician who dons the ubiquitous high-viz vest and hard hat when they visit the mine, or*
  - *plonks a brand new, genuine Akubra hat on their head if they’re going somewhere rural...*

*Sure – the inner-city politician will blend right in...*

*Your clothes don’t change who you are...*

And Jesus says “**Consider**” ... Are you anxious? Well, think on this – take **this** into account...

**Consider the ravens:** In Australia, think “crows”. *I hate crows. Ever since the first time I saw a crow on the back of a sheep, reaching around trying to peck its eyes out, I have hated crows ever since – wicked, evil things... And they’re cunning. If I shot one, I probably wouldn’t get another opportunity for another 3 years. And oh how sad it was when they banned Lucijet. I’ve been told, that it’s easy to kill hundreds of crows with Lucijet. (Not saying I did it).*

And even by the Jewish religious law, crows are considered unclean (probably because they eat dead carcasses). But God **provides** those dead carcasses for the crows...

They don't plant; They don't harvest; They don't store their tucker away (*just in case there's a shortage of dead kangaroos on the side of the road next month*)... God feeds the crows – despicable creatures as they are... *You think about that, next time you take out a roo on the road – “I've just done God's work, feeding the birds” ...*

Consider that. And consider how much more better you are, than **any** bird, nether lone a stinking crow that eats carrion on the side of the road... God sent His one and only Son to die for you... He didn't do that for any bird...

And as a Disciple of Jesus, do you **believe** that God loves you? BTW, it's not because you are so wonderful, that God loves you – it's because of the loving, merciful nature of God... And if we understand how much we are loved by God, then we're **not** going to have any trouble, knowing that He will provide – that He will provide food/clothes/shelter.

And, what good is worry, anyway? What **good** is anxiety? It's never done anybody any good...

*They tell me that “stress” is one of the biggest causes of heart attacks – don't get stressed about it – it'll probably **shorten** your life, rather than lengthen it...*

Worry, does **not** lengthen a person's life. The Bible version we had this morning (ESV), said: <sup>25</sup> **And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?**

And the original Greek can sort of be translated that way, and most Bible versions do, but in **this** case the New King James Version is actually closer when it says

(NKJV) <sup>27</sup> **Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?**

In other words, by worrying, can you make yourself 18" taller. It's not going to happen, is it...

You see, the Greek word for "stature": It can mean either the length of a person's life, or the length of the person... But the actual **unit** that's used in this sentence, means "One cubit", which is a measure of length (not a measure of time). So, a more **literal** translation could be "Which of you by worrying, can add one cubit to the length of his body/life?"...

But whether Jesus meant adding "One cubit to your height" or "One hour to your life", makes no difference – the point remains the same. Worry will not do you any good. Why not? Because we're talking about things that are in God's domain... It is **God** who determines how tall one will grow. It is **God** who determines the length of our days...

And worry and anxiety does nothing other than knock-you-about...

Jesus then gave the example of clothing. Do you worry about what you are going to wear? Consider the wild-flowers in the paddocks...

*When I take the time to look at the most simple of flowers, close up, they are beautiful things.*

They don't toil; They don't spin, but they are more beautiful, than the most beautiful outfit money can buy... And they're out there – wild-flowers, in a grassy paddock... <sup>28</sup> **But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!**

You see, it is a matter of faith: What do I really believe?

Do I believe that God is powerful? Do I believe that God will provide me with what I need (food; clothing; shelter)? Then there's no need for fear/worry/anxiety. Let what you know in your head, get through to your heart...

Anxiety, is the antithesis of faith (opposite of faith)... Faith breeds hope/trust/joy. There's no room for anxiety, because we know that that we are loved by God and God will provide what we need... (Maybe not what we want, but He will give us what we need)...

And that, is the difference that faith makes. People of the **world** worry about that sort of stuff, (And **we** used to worry about that sort of stuff (before faith took ahold)). But faith changes everything. Now, we seek something higher...

Jesus said: <sup>31</sup> **Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.**

Do you understand this? In Christ, our priority, becomes the Kingdom of God – that’s what we seek... Our daily needs – that’s a mere side issue, and for God, it’s no biggie...

And, this is the promise of God: Seek the Kingdom of God (**instead** of the other stuff), and He will make sure we have what we need...

And I love V32. I’ve never heard anyone say “This is my favourite verse in the Bible”, but you know what, as I’ve read this, and as I’ve considered it, it’s fast becoming one of **my** favourites:

<sup>32</sup> **“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”**

**little flock** – There’s something intimate about Jesus being the shepherd and us being His sheep – He’s not like a Queensland grazier – that aims to handle the massive flock with as little interaction as possible – Jesus knows us intimately.

And **it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.**

Now, let's drill down a bit – what does that mean? What is the Kingdom of God? Well, Jesus goes on to describe, how the Kingdom of God breaks into the world...

You see, **entering** the Kingdom of God, is more than just “saying the Sinners Prayer”. If that's all it was, I could teach a budgie to become a Christian... To become a Christian, is to undergo a complete change of allegiance. We turn wholeheartedly toward Christ.

And when you become a Christian/Disciple of Jesus, the Holy Spirit moves into your life, and we are transformed by Him, within... And the Holy Spirit working in You and I, **is** the Kingdom of God breaking into this world...

And in V33, Jesus is giving a picture of what this new Godliness looks like, in very practical terms. He said: <sup>33</sup> **Sell your possessions, and give to the needy.**

Oh, now hold on a minute – that's a bit extreme!!! Giving some of my excess, that's one thing, but that was hard-earned cash that paid for that thing... But <sup>33</sup> **Sell your possessions, and give to the needy.**

There's no limit to the mercies of the Kingdom of God... He's talking about the giving of alms... It's a compassionate showing of mercy to the destitute – to those who are **genuinely** in need...

And, if you want to have a bit of an idea of what that looks like, read about the Early Church in the book of Acts.

### Acts 2:45 (ESV)

<sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

### Acts 4:34-35 (ESV)

<sup>34</sup> There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold <sup>35</sup> and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

You see, this is **how** God provides for His people. In fact, they were so selfless, they didn't even want to retain control of it themselves.

Jesus said, Seek first, the Kingdom of God, and what you need, will be given to you. He said, **Don't** worry about what you're going to eat, or what you're going to wear – God knows what you need, and He will provide it.

How does God provide these things? Through His people(of course)... *If there was one of us here, who through no fault of their own, found themselves destitute, you would help them, would you not???*

*And I have seen this done many times. One of you notices, another is in need, and you've handed me some cash, and you've said, "Can you give this to so-&-so – I don't want them to know it's from me, but I know they need it." And I've taken the cash to that person, and in tears, they are so thankful, because they know that **God** has provided for their desperate need...*

God has promised, "Don't be anxious – I know what you need", and He's come through for them...

**it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.**

And we experience the Kingdom of God today, as the people of God, love each other so much, that we would even sell what we have, if that's what it took, to provide for the desperate need of the other...

But, let me put some "safety rails" on this.

1. This is not some form of Asceticism.

Do you know what Asceticism is? It is seeking some kind of holy poverty. It's not about gaining holiness by making ourselves poor. It's about trusting in God.

The security that we have in God, frees us to be generous, because we know that we're not going to go without. And so, we can be loving and merciful in the way we care for others.

2. Trusting that God is going to provide our needs, isn't about becoming welfare-dependent...

In some of the letters in the New Testament, it seems there were some who **were** becoming "welfare dependent", and that had to be addressed.

2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 (ESV)

<sup>10</sup> For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. <sup>11</sup> For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. <sup>12</sup> Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

And he said something similar for widows. In 1 Timothy 5, he instructs how the **families** of the widow should look after her. But if she's **aged**, and **cannot** provide for herself, and there's **no** one to look after her, then her Christian brothers and sisters generously provide what she needs. And he warns that if someone too young is living from handouts, then they become idle... And that isn't Godly.

And we see that in our land today, don't we???

3. The picture that we are given, is **not** some kind of Marxist utopia, where everything is levelled out...

- And if a person is rich, we need to strip their riches away, so that they are level with the poor;
- If a particular social class is seen to be privileged, they need to be cut down;

That's not what this is about...

Whether we are rich, or whether we are poor, in Christ Jesus, we are one... The Christian church, is probably the only organisation in history, where a slave may be preaching to a slave owner... Such, is the Kingdom of God.

Let's come back to Heaven's First National:

V<sup>34</sup> For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

It takes a step of faith. Godly living; Being part of the Kingdom of God breaking into this world, takes faith...

In faith, we stop grasping; Stop clinging:

- to things;
- to stuff;
- to this world's source of security...

And as we are filled with empathy; and compassion; and mercy, And as we start caring for people in very practical ways,,,,, without even knowing it, deposits are being made in HFN...

You see, we don't do it **for** the reward, because it's not about "self"... But the reward comes (without us even knowing it, the reward is being stacked away in HFN), because as part of the Kingdom of God, we have done God's work, by caring for those whom He loves.

The heart of a Disciple of Jesus, is drawn to Godliness. And it is the Father's good pleasure, for you and I, to experience the Kingdom of God. And we **do** experience the Kingdom of God, when we let go of what the world expects us to cling to, and allow the Spirit of God, to lead us into Kingdom living...

My prayer, is:

Lord, Your Kingdom come.

On earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day, what we need today.

and fill us with Your compassion and mercy,

With Your generosity and Love,

And may we be serving You,

as we experience Your Kingdom in our midst.

in Jesus' Name,

Amen.